

Message

From: Melvin, Karen [Melvin.Karen@epa.gov]
Sent: 3/29/2016 2:02:57 PM
To: Garvin, Shawn [garvin.shawn@epa.gov]; Capacasa, Jon [Capacasa.jon@epa.gov]; Armstead, John A. [Armstead.John@epa.gov]
CC: Rodrigues, Cecil [rodrigues.cecil@epa.gov]; D'Andrea, Michael [DANDREA.MICHAEL@EPA.GOV]; Ryan, Daniel [Ryan.Daniel@epa.gov]; Searfoss, Renee [searfoss.renee@epa.gov]
Subject: RE: Headlines Highlights for RA's Tablet - MONDAY, March 28, 2016

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

Karen Melvin

*Hazardous Site Cleanup Division
US EPA, Region 3
1650 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-814-3275*



From: Garvin, Shawn
Sent: Tuesday, March 29, 2016 9:20 AM
To: Capacasa, Jon <Capacasa.jon@epa.gov>; Melvin, Karen <Melvin.Karen@epa.gov>; Armstead, John A. <Armstead.John@epa.gov>
Cc: Rodrigues, Cecil <rodrigues.cecil@epa.gov>; D'Andrea, Michael <DANDREA.MICHAEL@EPA.GOV>; Ryan, Daniel <Ryan.Daniel@epa.gov>; Searfoss, Renee <searfoss.renee@epa.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Headlines Highlights for RA's Tablet - MONDAY, March 28, 2016

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Seneca, Roy" <Seneca.Roy@epa.gov>
Date: March 28, 2016 at 1:44:12 PM EDT
To: "Garvin, Shawn" <garvin.shawn@epa.gov>, "Ryan, Daniel" <Ryan.Daniel@epa.gov>, "Rodrigues, Cecil" <rodrigues.cecil@epa.gov>, "Searfoss, Renee" <searfoss.renee@epa.gov>, "schafer, joan" <schafer.joan@epa.gov>, "D'Andrea, Michael" <DANDREA.MICHAEL@EPA.GOV>, "White, Terri-A" <White.Terri-A@epa.gov>, "Smith, Bonnie" <smith.bonnie@epa.gov>, "Seneca, Roy" <Seneca.Roy@epa.gov>, "Sternberg, David" <Sternberg.David@epa.gov>, "Miller, Linda" <miller.linda@epa.gov>, "Colip, Matthew" <colip.matthew@epa.gov>, "Ferrell, Mark" <Ferrell.Mark@epa.gov>, "Brown, Kinshasa" <Brown.Kinshasa@epa.gov>, "Hamilton, Brian" <Hamilton.Brian@epa.gov>, "Tate, Rita" <Tate.Rita@epa.gov>, "graves, john" <graves.john@epa.gov>, "Zirilli, Alysia" <Zirilli.Alysia@epa.gov>
Subject: Headlines Highlights for RA's Tablet - MONDAY, March 28, 2016

Headlines Highlights for RA's Tablet -

MONDAY, March 28, 2016

Chesapeake Bay Journal

Toxic pollution ongoing in Anacostia, study finds

Fresh additions discovered to "legacy" contaminants already fouling District's "forgotten" river

By Whitney Pipkin
March 25, 2016

Toxic pollution continues to wash into the Anacostia River in the District of Columbia, adding to the longstanding contamination that already makes it unsafe for residents to swim or wade in some places or eat fish caught from its waters.

That's the surprising finding of a new study commissioned by the District Department of Energy & Environment as it begins work on a plan to clean up toxic hot spots in the "forgotten river," as the Potomac River tributary has been dubbed because of its severely degraded condition.

In a nearly 200-page report, Tetra Tech, the District's consultant, provided new details on the high levels of toxic chemicals and metals already known to linger in the river's sediment from historic and mostly industrial pollution sources.

But the report, released late last week, noted that sampling of river sediments also detected evidence in certain spots of ongoing pollution – a finding Wesley Rosenfeld, assistant DOEE general counsel, called "unanticipated."

"Something is happening basically as we speak," Rosenfeld said. "We can't clean up the river without eliminating an ongoing source of contamination."

Rosenfeld said particularly high levels of contaminants in some samples near outfalls and industrial sites indicate the pollution "isn't just historical."

Though the report calls for further investigation to confirm sources, it found high levels of contaminants near outfalls at the Washington Gas Light Company's former coal-gasification plant and the Washington Navy Yard, located on either side of the 11th Street Bridge. The spike in contaminants was also found near the former Steuart Petroleum terminal just downstream of the South Capitol Street Bridge.

These locations are among about a dozen along the river that already are considered potential environmental cleanup sites based on their historical contamination of groundwater or river sediment, including a recently demolished Pepco plant on Benning Road and federal sites like the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Based on more than 900 samples collected and analyzed over two years, the Anacostia Sediment Remediation Investigation Report represents the most extensive analysis to date of the contaminants that have been leaching into the river for generations. Its findings form the foundation for the District's cleanup plan, which will require parties responsible for the contamination to share in the cost of its cleanup.

The DOEE commissioned the study as part of its commitment to produce a final plan by mid-2018 for cleaning up contamination in a 9-mile stretch of the Anacostia. It is available for public comment until May 8.

"The District of Columbia and the public have known that the Anacostia River is degraded," Rosenfeld said. "This report doesn't tell us anything different. What it does tell us is where those contaminants are located and how they affect human health and the environment."

It confirms, for instance, that the suite of toxins found in the river's sediment and waters include known carcinogens that threaten the health of wildlife and of those who eat fish from the Anacostia. Advisories warning residents not to eat what they fish from the river already are in place, but a 2013 study found that many of them still do.

The report details how the sediments of this tidal river still bear the scars of an urban and industrial past, one advocates say won't go away without a costly cleanup. Among the options to be considered for dealing with the toxic sediments: dredging and removing them, or capping them in place with a clay layer to prevent them from being picked up by the organisms that fish eat or from being stirred back into the water.

Representatives from organizations expected to submit comments on the report said they were still wading through its findings this week.

"While there is always more data that could be collected, we now need to shift our attention to developing the plan to clean up these legacy pollutants," Jim Foster, president of the Anacostia Watershed Society, stated in a press release.

The report lists several of the sites as potential sources of polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), compounds associated with incomplete burning of fossil fuels or other organic materials, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), now-banned chemicals once widely used as coolants or insulators in electrical equipment. Both groups of chemicals are associated with cancer.

Pesticides were also found throughout the river samples as well as toxins, such as lead and mercury that can cause problems with the immune and nervous systems of living organisms.

Beleaguered organisms

Researchers analyzed hundreds of samples from the river's first 6 inches of sediment, subsurface sediment (up to 10 feet below the river bottom surface) and water, as well as fish tissue and the small organisms that fish eat.

Those benthic organisms that live in or on the bottom sediments are often the first to show signs of contamination, which then travels up the food chain as other animals eat them. In this study, 75 percent of the benthic organisms sampled demonstrated some form of toxicity from being exposed to the sediment.

“That means they either had shorter lives or poorer overall health” when compared with a control group, said Rosenfeld.

Those poor health trends continued as they traveled up the food chain. Fish tissue showed the presence of PCBs and heavy metals throughout the study area, with higher levels in some reaches like the Washington Channel.

The report’s findings bolster warnings that anglers should limit their consumption of locally caught fish, especially bottom-feeders from some portions of the river, and that people should not swim in the river — though the District would like to remove both of those warnings by 2032.

“Addressing the legacy pollution is one of the last major hurdles in making the Anacostia River fishable and swimmable by 2025,” Foster said, citing an earlier goal that his organization has set. “It’s time to get it done.”

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

U.S. Steel agrees to \$3.9M air pollution settlement with Allegheny County

By David Conti
March 25, 2016

U.S. Steel Corp. agreed to make fixes at its Clairton Coke Works to address ongoing air pollution problems as part of a settlement with Allegheny County that has already cost the company nearly \$4 million in fines.

Despite a series of amended agreements between the Downtown-based company and the county health department dating back to at least 2007, the massive plant continues to violate health rules and its permits by exceeding limits on air pollution, the county said. The company has paid more than \$3.9 million in fines since 2009 and agreed to pay another \$25,000 within 60 days.

The latest agreement, outlined in court papers filed this week, is the result of years of negotiations between the struggling steelmaker and the health department that allow the plant to continue operating for at least five years while it makes fixes.

“We are confident that with this consent judgment, U.S. Steel will take all necessary steps to bring Clairton Coke Works into compliance with the law,” Jim Thompson, the department's deputy director for environmental health, said in a statement Friday announcing the agreement. “In the event that it is still unable to correct the problem, we have made certain that any continuing violations will be met with significant penalties and consequences.”

U.S. Steel said it was pleased with the agreement.

“We are fortunate to be able to work with (the Allegheny County Health Department) to ensure the future of not only Clairton, but the entire Mon Valley Works,” spokeswoman Sarah Cassella wrote in an email.

“Environmental stewardship is a core value at U.S. Steel.”

Requirements in the agreement, some of which continue from previous orders, include:

- Inspecting oven walls and coming up with a plan to repair them
- Meeting standards that limit pollution in emissions from oven batteries within three years
- Keeping coal inside ovens for minimum time periods to reduce emissions
- Making observations of smoke plumes from certain equipment several times a day.

Failure to fulfill the requirements in various time frames outlined in the agreement will result in fines ranging from \$500 per hour for some violations to \$40,000 per month.

“It appears it's more of the same. We will allow the polluter to continue to pollute as long as they pay” the county, said George Jugovic, chief counsel for environmental advocacy group PennFuture.

Thompson said the agreement forces U.S. Steel to engineer solutions “that will bring its entire facility into compliance in the fastest way possible.”

PennFuture in January filed a 60-day notice in federal court threatening to sue over what it considered the county's failure to properly enforce air pollution limits and the previous agreements. The 60 days — a requirement for lawsuits under the Clean Air Act — were due to expire next week.

Jugovic said the group requested to take part in the negotiations between the county and U.S. Steel but the health department said no.

“Their response was to go back behind closed doors ... close out citizens, and don't involve them in the process, even though we're the ones affected,” he said.

Thompson responded that filing a 60-day notice does not give someone “a seat at the negotiating table.

“It is to allow the agency to address the issues,” he said through a spokeswoman. “It is (the health department's) responsibility to enforce the regulations. While we consider citizen input in developing our actions, we negotiate these directly with the company.”

PennFuture will consider seeking to intervene in the court case connected to the agreement — which Common Pleas Judge Christine Ward signed on the same day it was filed — or might file a separate lawsuit, Jugovic said.

Fine particulates and other pollutants from the coke plant and other sources make the air around Clairton and nearby Liberty some of the worst in the region. The county has struggled for years to meet and maintain compliance with ever-changing federal standards that limit certain pollutants in that area.

The Clairton facility has 10 batteries of ovens where it converts metallurgical coal into coke used in steelmaking, and facilities for processing byproducts.

U.S. Steel in 2013 finished installing a new Battery C to replace older ovens, calling it the centerpiece of \$500 million in upgrades at the plant. The agreement outlines other steps the company has taken to reduce pollution, including the replacement of two quench towers, the closing of three batteries of ovens, and a combined \$60 million in repairs to batteries 1, 2, 3, and 15.

The company has been battered in recent years by a downturn in the steel industry and slackening demand for many of its products that have prompted thousands of layoffs and numerous plant closures. Reduced production and low prices led to a 34 percent drop in sales last year and a full-year net loss of \$1.5 billion.

Associated Press (W. Va.)

Rising GOP star in West Virginia fight for coal against EPA

By JOHN RABY / Associated Press

March 26, 2016

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) - Patrick Morrisey, the West Virginia attorney general taking on President Obama's clean power plan, is no stranger to the hot seat: He parlayed a love of tennis as a young adult into becoming a line judge at the U.S. Open and other tournaments, regularly standing up to second-guessing by irate players and fans.

Fast forward to 2016. The 48-year-old transplanted New Jersey native is challenging the Obama administration's calls, joined by several mostly Republican states in suing to try to overturn federal greenhouse gas rules. He says taking the heat on the courts taught him to stay cool in court years later.

"You learn how to handle pressure when you have a crowd of people screaming at you for one of your calls," Morrisey told The Associated Press. "... Of course, I'd not like to repeat being booed out of the stadium. But that could be good practice for politics."

Elected in 2012, West Virginia's first GOP attorney general in eight decades has made fighting "federal overreach" his mantra. He's leading a coalition of attorneys general that won a U.S. Supreme Court stay last month against Obama's clean power plan.

That plan against climate change focuses particularly on cutting pollutants from coal-fired power plants. Welcomed by many, it's blasted by critics as a possible knockout blow to the coal industry.

Pressed by Morrisey's group, the justices froze the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to reduce U.S. carbon-dioxide emissions 32 percent by 2030 - while legal challenges are pending.

In West Virginia, seven coal-fired power plants have shut in recent years, and more than 1,000 miners have lost work since December alone.

"I'm very fortunate to have this job at this time so I could fight for coal miners and make West Virginia a better place to live," Morrisey said.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, co-chair of the attorney generals' group, said Morrisey's a fighter: "He quickly recognized what an impact it would have on West Virginia. I think that's why he grabbed the leadership mantle."

More than a dozen other states support Obama's plan, while environmentalists criticize Morrisey as hindering moves toward cleaner energy sources.

"We believe that the attorney general's blind allegiance to coal is a disservice to future generations," said Jim Kotcon of West Virginia's Sierra Club chapter. "The clean power plan is necessary to address climate change. We think the EPA is on sound legal ground."

The White House declined to comment about Morrisey.

Democratic California Gov. Jerry Brown wrote Morrisey and Paxton that their arguments were "legally flimsy" and "at worst, you're sending a dangerous message to the world: on climate change, do nothing."

Of detractors, Morrisey said: "People aren't always going to be happy with every decision that you make. But if you make the right decision and you stick to it, good things will usually happen."

It's a fight Morrisey didn't foresee upon moving to Harpers Ferry in 2006 from a private Washington, D.C., law practice. Yet the longer he lived in West Virginia, "the more I realized the state was being held back by policies that were not in the people's interest."

Frustrated by a five-term attorney general reluctant to oppose Obama's policies, Morrisey ran in 2012 and won. His campaign aligned with state Democrats accusing Obama of waging "war on coal."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce acknowledged involvement in Morrisey's race. President and CEO Thomas J. Donahue said the Chamber's Institute for Legal Reform, which doesn't have to disclose its donors, conducted "voter education efforts" in several states that year. Board members include executives at several big corporations, including energy companies.

Morrisey's campaign continues.

In 2013, after Obama targeted carbon dioxide at power plants, Morrisey filed a Supreme Court brief, joined by other states.

In 2014, Morrisey wrote "Why I Sued The President," a "National Review" article on Obama's dare to Republicans to try to block his initiatives. "I accepted the president's invitation," Morrisey wrote. "A president is not a king."

Morrisey also sued over federal moves to shift legal responsibility to the states for canceled health plans and took on pharmaceutical makers while seeking stronger prescription drug regulations in a state rife with fatal overdoses.

"Our intent is always to win cases," Morrisey told The AP. "We only file lawsuits and briefs when we believe we are correct on the merits. We have tried to gum up the works on a number of cases because of what the administration has been doing in terms of its abuse of executive authority ... "

Regarding his own views on climate change, Morrisey said he focuses strictly on opposing regulations capable of a "great deal of harm."

Sure, he wants clean air and water. But his emphasis "will remain solely on the law. To move off of that and start to talk about the policy ideas when we're in the middle of a lawsuit really is not appropriate."

Morrisey won't hint at future goals beyond getting re-elected this fall.

Observers say his newfound prominence could take him, as with West Virginia, to places he never expected. "Patrick Morrisey is in charge of his own destiny politically," said Conrad Lucas, West Virginia's Republican Party chairman.

For Morrisey, tackling a problem with a "little bit of smarts" and a willingness to "outwork" others is a recipe for success. He's quick to add: "When you have an opportunity to make a difference, you take advantage of it."

This story has been corrected to say that the White House declined to comment instead of not responding to a request for comment.

Chesapeake Bay Journal

Iffy future seen for some Bay marshes as sea level rises

Study finds most Northeastern coastal wetlands could avoid inundation from climate change

By Jeff Day
March 25, 2016

The chances are no better than even that the ecologically vital marshes on the southeastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay can adapt fast enough to survive encroaching waters after the next decade, according to the lead author of a new study of sea level rise impact.

Erika Lentz and her colleagues found that marshes, forests and especially beaches will adapt to sea level rise, to varying degrees. The study, published in the journal Nature Climate Change, focused on the northern half of the eastern seaboard and offered relatively promising news for undeveloped parts of the coast as a whole.

“The shore might look a lot different but it will still be there,” Lentz told the Bay Journal.

However, the U.S. Geological Survey scientist, based in Woods Hole, MA, said marshes on the low-lying, southeastern shore of the Bay are unlikely to move inland fast enough to avoid inundation by rising sea levels predicted beyond the 2020s.

An even grimmer prediction is made for developed land. The study found that terrain has no adaptability. Lentz said she is fascinated by this question: When will sea level rise cause the bottom to drop out of the coastal real estate market?

But predictions aside, the demise of the region’s marshes is not destiny, according to Doug Myers, senior scientist with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Marshes will move inland as long as they don’t run up against a barrier, such as a road, Myers said. Steps can be taken to preserve them, he said, such as removing barriers and spraying modest amounts of sediment on them to keep them from being inundated.

The Bay Foundation is working with Wicomico County, MD and the Corps of Engineers to build up local marshes there, using sediment dredged periodically from the Wicomico River for navigation purposes, Myers said.

Donald Boesch, president of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, pointed out that there are a number of studies looking at the survivability of marshes in the midst of sea level rise, and the findings vary.

“It’s hard to predict the rate and pattern of marsh erosion,” he noted, adding that a recent study from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science found that the marshes would fare somewhat better.

“We need to know where we can take action to protect marshes, allow them to move inland and add sediment,” he said.

In the meantime, the threats posed by unchecked greenhouse gas emissions are severe, Boesch warned.

“We could see a Bay that’s a lot bigger, a lot deeper, with just a few marshes – or not,” Boesch said.

“It all depends on the choices made by this generation and the next,” Boesch said. If nothing changes soon, he said, all indications are that there will be vast sea level rise in the 2100s, with the Antarctic ice shelf disintegrating and melting.

USA Today

EPA delay releasing danger level for lead in water sparks concern, questions

By Alison Young
March 26, 2016

Nearly a year ago, officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said work was underway to create a health-hazard standard for lead in drinking water, records from agency advisory group meetings show.

Yet despite growing public concern about high levels of lead coming out of taps in Flint, Mich., as well as at homes and schools in all 50 states, the EPA still hasn’t released results of computer models estimating what lead level in water poses a serious health threat and should trigger local health department help for families.

“People across the country and in Flint need to know what EPA thinks the level is at which a household should consider taking action,” said Tom Neltner, a member of the EPA’s lead and copper work group and chemicals policy director for the Environmental Defense Fund.

“I think it’s stuck within the EPA decision-making,” Neltner said. “I think they have it. I think they are arguing about it.”

EPA officials declined to grant an interview and did not answer USA TODAY NETWORK questions about why the analysis is taking so long and what deadlines agency leadership has set to ensure timely progress.

“EPA is analyzing data on lead exposure, blood lead level models and exposure pathways,” the agency said in an emailed statement. “Once the agency has a scientifically robust analysis, and completes internal agency reviews, we intend to seek external peer review.”

The EPA hasn’t begun an internal review yet because, among other things, it still is evaluating approaches that at least five offices within the agency use for predicting a person’s blood lead level based on exposures, the statement said. The goal is for the level to be included in a package of regulatory proposals the agency expects to publish sometime in 2017.

Current EPA regulations do not include a health-hazard standard for lead in drinking water. In regulating water systems, the EPA has set what it calls an “action level” for lead of 15 parts per billion to trigger water-treatment actions if more than 10% of faucets sampled exceed that level.

But the number is only an engineering standard that, when it was set in 1991, was considered to be the lowest amount of lead in water that systems could achieve reliably through adding anti-corrosion chemicals.

“Right now people are using the current action level as if it had meaning for health, even though it is not based on health,” Neltner said

Some studies have documented harms from drinking water contaminated at far lower levels. The EPA and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention both say lead in drinking water is not safe at any concentration.

The EPA has set a maximum contaminant goal of zero for lead in drinking water. The goal is not enforceable, and experts say it also is impossible to achieve because millions of U.S. homes receive water that passes through lead pipes and plumbing.

Without a health-hazard level, the public and water systems can't put lead test results in any context or know when immediate action is needed, said Marc Edwards, the Virginia Tech water engineering expert whose team has independently investigated Flint's contamination issues.

You have to have some level that requires people to know when their health is in danger,” Edwards said. “Whatever they set, I think they're fearful of the fallout.

"People are measuring lead in schools again, and they're getting levels in the hundreds of parts per billion,” he said.

This month a USA TODAY NETWORK investigation revealed nearly 2,000 water systems serving about 6 million people have failed to meet the EPA's existing lead standard since 2012. About 350 of the failing systems are dedicated to serving schools and day-care centers, and about 600 of the systems had tests at some taps showing lead levels topping 40 ppb, EPA enforcement data show.

"Your series has really driven it home, more so than anyone else, how widespread this problem is," Edwards said. "EPA has to make a decision about some level of contamination that poses a health threat."

Meeting minutes from an EPA drinking water expert advisory group indicate agency staff made progress coming up with a health hazard number last year and thought it might even be released by late 2015.

As of this past April, EPA staff told the lead and copper working group that the agency had an existing computer model to help determine what level of lead in a home's tap water posed a serious health risk. Joyce Donohue of EPA's Office of Science and Technology discussed factors that would need to be considered in the modeling.

At that time, the working group was in the process of drafting recommendations for creation of a household action level for lead.

The group's recommendation was for the EPA to come up with a level of lead in drinking water that posed a health danger to those considered.

At greatest risk were infants fed formula made with tap water, the group said. The modeling should establish a hazard level that would protect them from having dangerous levels of lead in their blood.

If a water test found lead above this household action level, the group wanted public health experts notified so they could investigate and help.

In June, records show that members asked about the EPA's progress in developing a household action level, which EPA officials dubbed HAL.

Eric Burneson of the EPA's Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water "indicated that EPA is working on establishing the HAL, but that it will take some time because the HAL must undergo a peer review and quality assurance. It may or may not be available for the full (advisory council) meeting in late 2015." Burneson is the director of the water office's standards and risk management division.

"Nine months ago, EPA said it needed to complete quality assurance and peer review before releasing a draft household action level," Neltner said.

But he believes that the EPA has an obligation as a public health agency to release information about a hazard level as quickly as possible.

Scranton Times-Tribune

Report ranks Pennsylvania second for lead-laden water

By John O'Connell

March 26, 2016

Elevated lead levels in tap water samples at three sites in Lackawanna and Wyoming counties recently reported by USA Today were isolated incidents and no cause for alarm, local officials say.

USA Today published a series of stories last week and listed levels of the toxin in water systems nationwide. It found Pennsylvania ranked second in the nation for elevated lead levels in tap water samples based on federal Environmental Protection Agency data from 2012 through 2015. USA Today found 157 incidents of excessive lead in Pennsylvania. Only Texas ranked higher with 183 within the time period.

In Northeast Pennsylvania,

USA Today reported that water samples showed lead levels in excess of the EPA's 15 parts per billion limit at St. Mary's Villa nursing home, Elmhurst Twp., Scott Technology Park, Scott Twp., and Keystone College, LaPlume Twp..

Lead in excess of the EPA's limit does not necessarily trigger an automatic violation, although the agency requires action either by re-testing or some sort of remedy. Violations occur whenever water system operators do not comply with federal rules in any stage of monitoring, treatment, public education or reporting, according to the EPA.

At Keystone College, routine water tests at the Gambal Athletic Center, Harris Hall and the Miller Library showed elevated lead levels in 2013. Tests showed lead at 83 ppb at the college. Subsequent testing showed levels “quickly returned to normal” and remained that way ever since, said college spokesman Fran Calpin.

The most recent testing at Keystone happened in December. College officials found no explanation for why the 2013 tests were so high.

In Scott Twp., Pennsylvania American Water purchased a small water system from the township in 2014, and the utility knew there had been a lead issue the year before, said spokeswoman Susan Turcmanovich. The system, fed by two wells, serves five commercial customers in Scott Technology Park.

“They had a non-compliant sample. The (state Department of Environmental Protection) told them you have to sample again or install treatment,” she said. “They sampled again and it came back compliant.”

Without changing anything in the system, water consistently tested under federal lead limits, she said. Plans are underway to connect the business park to Pennsylvania American Water’s Lake Scranton water system.

At St. Mary’s Villa nursing home, the water pipes have “always been on the brink of having a problem,” said the nursing home’s water engineer Dan Farnham, president of Farnham & Associates Inc. in South Abington Twp, which specializes in water and waste water systems. Problems have never reached emergency status, he said.

Last year, water at the nursing home tested just over the 15 ppb lead threshold — at 16 ppb.

Six months ago, Mr. Farnham and the nursing home decided to fix the problem once and for all. They began a corrosion control study, and plan to start upgrades as soon as the paperwork is complete, he said.

To keep lead and copper from leaching from pipes and solder into the water, Mr. Farnham said a thin mineral coating called scaling, created by slightly hard water, has to build up a little inside the pipes, and that isn’t happening now in the nursing home’s system.

Lead is a common problem in this region, he said, and mitigating it makes up a substantial part of his company’s business.

Children and pregnant women are most susceptible to harmful lead effects. Long-term exposure can bring on heart and kidney problems and high blood pressure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It can cause behavioral and intellectual development problems in infants, and in the worst cases cause miscarriages, stillbirths and infertility in both men and women. Any blood lead level in children is considered to be possibly harmful.

USA Today also identified elevated lead levels in systems in Wayne County, including Preston Elementary School in the Wayne Highlands School District. The newspaper did not list any elevated lead levels in Luzerne, Pike and Susquehanna counties.

In 2012, water in Preston Elementary tested at 22 ppb, according to EPA data. Superintendent Gregory Frigoletto said he did not read the USA Today article but he denied there were lead problems in any school building.

The district contracts with a water-testing company to detect problems, and would react quickly to any problems that might crop up, he said.

The other water systems in Wayne County that USA Today reported had elevated lead levels from 2012 through 2015 are: Aqua Pennsylvania Gouldsboro, 31 ppb; Saber Healthcare Group, 21 ppb; and Loveshaw Inc., 18 ppb.

Health officials are paying more attention to water-borne lead in light of a lead contamination issue in Flint, Michigan. Drinking water in Flint became tainted when, in a move to save money, city officials switched from the Detroit water system and began drawing from the Flint River in April 2014. Lead from the aging pipes contaminated the Flint water supply and elevated lead levels have been found in at least 325 people, including 221 children.

In Northeast Pennsylvania, high lead incidences appear more isolated and scattered, with problems originating in the pipes and water wells of specific buildings and smaller systems.

Roy Seneca
EPA Region 3 Press Officer
Office Communications and Government Relations
seneca.roy@epa.gov
(215) 814-5567